

Towards a Renewed NATO

Opening statement to the Group of Experts tasked with developing a new strategic concept for NATO

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Karl Kaiser

Adjunct Professor of Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government; Director, Program on Transatlantic Relations, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University

NATO no longer is what it once was, but, despite 60 years of evolution in strategy, institutional structure and membership, it is still reluctant to face the ultimate consequences of the changes in the security environment which give it a contemporary role quite different from what the founders envisaged.

NATO: An Institution of Governance

NATO has ceased to be a mere military alliance. It has become an institution of governance with global functions that makes a major contribution to world order. It grew into this role during the first decades of its existence without its members, let alone the outside world, fully realizing. Four dimensions are relevant here, each of great importance as we consider the future role of NATO in the global security environment.

First, within its own sphere NATO succeeded in implementing a goal to which the UN has always aspired but failed to accomplish, namely the prohibition of the use of force. War has been reliably eliminated among its members. In an unstable world this vast area of cooperation and peaceful relations is not only a remarkably positive outcome of an otherwise quite bloody century but represents an indispensable basis for constructive action to build up a better world order in what is likely to be an unstable 21st century.

Second, NATO became a highly successful framework for rebuilding and strengthening democracy, beginning with the integration of Germany and Italy, continuing with Greece, Spain and Portugal and more recently the

formerly Communist countries in Central and South East Europe. However, this contribution to governance in Europe remains incomplete; future measures will have to look for other methods besides membership to advance this cause.

Third, by its rational handling of nuclear weapons NATO made a crucial contribution to avoiding a nuclear war. Through its strategy, military practice as well as growing cooperation with its then adversary it helped to marginalize nuclear weapons and even branded them as taboo. Not only the continued existence of a vast nuclear potential of the former Cold War adversaries – a third still on trigger alert status – but, more acutely, the ongoing and potential proliferation of nuclear weapons make the inherent philosophy and gained experience of NATO in dealing with nuclear weapons extremely relevant to devising policies that help to avoid their use elsewhere in the world.

Fourth, NATO did not only succeed in avoiding war, it helped to end the very East West conflict which had been the original reason for its establishment using an innovative approach. By combining defense measures and cooperation with the adversary it brought to an end a conflict that could have destroyed humankind and provided an inspiring model to others for resolving even a major conflict.

Change in the Security Environment

Libraries have been filled with studies about the changes in the security environment after the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. For purposes of this analysis they shall be summarized around three groups of challenges which are the most important for NATO to consider:

First, the dissolution of states, civil wars, ethnic conflict, and genocide;
Second, the rise of terrorist actors, often with bases of operation in failing states;
Third, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, above all into the hands of terrorists.

All these challenges occur in an environment of increasingly open borders, transnational connectedness and interdependence that render the traditional territorial state more and more vulnerable and remove the protection of

geographic distance. Non-state actors, who no longer observe the rules which governed state behavior, become the dominant security challenge, though, while less probable than in the 20th century, the possibility of aggression by states can never be totally ruled out.

NATO's Prime Focus

NATO should focus its activities on four main goals:

First, NATO must prevent and defend its members and partners against terrorists who can potentially arm themselves with weapons of mass destruction. Considering the disastrous and history-changing impact of, for example, the explosion of a nuclear weapon in a city like New York, London or Paris, this must become NATO's overriding goal.

This means on the one hand that NATO must fight those terrorists that threaten its members and partners (i.e. not every terrorist movement in the world) through a broad range of policies ranging from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency, state building, development, diplomacy and dialogue. On the other hand NATO will have to pursue an energetic non-proliferation policy, nuclear arms control, policies to secure nuclear materials and weapons as well as an active counter proliferation policy. NATO's activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan would fall under this category.

Second, NATO must prevent or help to stop civil war, ethnic cleansing or genocide from destabilizing those states which have been identified as of particular concern to NATO, including cases mandated by the UN. The ongoing activities of NATO in the Balkans are a case in point.

Third, a commitment to assistance under Article V remains crucial, though the application of this clause remains highly improbable, partially because of the very existence of the commitment.

Fourth, NATO should support the strengthening of democracy in its neighborhood through cooperation and aid, but it must do so in full awareness of the fact that democracy must emerge from within countries and cannot be imposed from outside. In carefully considered cases enlargement of membership can serve this purpose.

Facing New Conditions

Ever since the East-West conflict ended, the relative clarity of what constituted a security threat has disappeared. In lieu of a pending or actual aggression as an accepted indicator, today internal conflict, the rise of a terrorist group or the mounting of missiles somewhere outside the NATO area may indicate the appearance of a security threat. However, almost inevitably opinions on when such a development represents a threat will differ inside a country and, of course, between countries. As NATO's tasks increasingly shift away from classical defense to dealing with terrorists, instability, state building etc., security threats become a matter of interpretation. As a consequence NATO will have to strengthen its capacities as an institution of assessment and political dialogue much more than in the past, obviously including a substantially improved capacity of intelligence gathering and interpretation. Needless to say, the strengthening of NATO's political functions will also be the result of its growing governance role.

A second problem arises which has an immediate bearing on the redefinition of NATO's strategic concept. During the East-West conflict war could have been massive and even nuclear, but remained theoretical, thanks to effective deterrence. Today military force is an everyday reality from "robust peace keeping" to combat against the Taliban and Al Qaida involving casualties and the expenditure of considerable resources. Since the risk to the lives of soldiers is no longer theoretical but real, governments have to face a much more difficult task of creating legitimacy for military involvement on a continuing basis; they must build support in societies that often do not sufficiently recognize the connection between external security challenges in distant countries and their security at home. This problem is aggravated in those member countries that do not have a tradition of intervention outside their borders. NATO will therefore have to use the elaboration of a new strategic concept to reinvent its legitimizing rationale.

Means of a Renewed NATO

NATO will be severely hampered in achieving any of its main goals unless it establishes a cooperative relationship with Russia. One could even argue that such an endeavor should be a goal of NATO in itself. Relations between Russia and the West have constantly deteriorated in the wake of NATO

enlargement. The NATO-Russia Council was not used by the West to address Russian concerns and establish a genuine partnership that recognizes legitimate interests of both sides in an intensive process of consultation. NATO should renew such efforts. The Obama Administration's new policy towards Russia has created the much welcomed basis for such a renewal, but more remains to be done. Measures should include deliberations on President Medvedev's proposal for a new European security system and a revival of Europe-wide conventional arms control by reopening negotiations on the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe.

Second, when implementing its goals NATO should organize partnerships around specific tasks by associating non-members who have similar interests on an ad hoc basis, as is being done, for example, with regard to Afghanistan. An effort should be made to involve them in the decision-making where ever their interests and contributions are affected. These partners can be like minded democracies from all continents or simply countries that share interests with NATO. To offer formal membership to democracies on a global basis, as has been suggested by some, would not only create a division which could undermine the UN system, it would also transform NATO into an unmanageable colossus.

Third, a renewed NATO that takes upon itself the much broader tasks of an institution of governance that also includes an alliance and a military dimension, will have to make an unprecedented effort to coordinate the constituent elements of policies, including intelligence, state building, development, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, or counter proliferation. A new strategic concept should analyze how the existing institutional structure should be revised including the creation of mechanisms or institutions that assure coordination around ongoing task forces.

Fourth, the tasks of a renewed NATO require a reallocation of resources in two directions: a strengthening of non-military resources to deal with the problems at hand such as development aid, intelligence, or state building, and a drastic restructuring of the armed forces of the European alliance members to make their forces usable and deployable outside their borders which is now the case for only a small proportion. Such reallocation would contribute to the necessary strengthening of the NATO Response Force as well as the EU instruments for military deployment outside its borders.

Finally, a strengthening of cooperation and coordination between NATO and EU is imperative, in order to explore unused synergies and induce Europe to devise a better division of labor. This would not only require convincing Turkey to stop blocking such cooperation but above all it would require a courageous pooling of the EU's military resources to stop the present waste that preserves obsolete structures and an unnecessary multitude of weapons systems.